

Reflections on an experiential learning model for evidence synthesis education in libraries

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Abstract

Background: Evidence synthesis (ES) tasks for librarians require significant time and effort. For those unfamiliar with ES, acquiring the necessary skills can be challenging. Various training opportunities are available that address topics like methodology, effective search strategies, and project management. However, developing soft skills such as negotiation, collaboration, reflective practice, and mentoring typically requires direct experience managing projects. This paper outlines an experiential learning model designed to offer librarians new to ES practical training and guidance. The purpose of the model is to facilitate knowledge of ES work and to enable librarians to mentor others in this area.

Experience: This paper outlines the model's layers—Beginner, Novice, Competent, and Proficient—and shares perspectives from participants. As librarians advance through the model, they develop expertise and practical soft skills. Reflections from various library professionals highlight the advantages of this self-sustaining framework.

Takeaways: The model effectively integrates technical and interpersonal skills, cultivating library professionals who are equipped to lead teams, instruct on methodological standards, and manage authorship negotiation and conflict resolution. By promoting competence and confidence, this approach empowers librarians to advocate for their own contributions and expertise. Furthermore, it encourages a culture of mentorship among both mentors and mentees, preparing new librarians in evidence synthesis to eventually guide their peers. In summary, the model underscores the value of embedding education and mentorship within library practice.

Background

Evidence synthesis (ES) has become a cornerstone in modern research, providing critical insights across disciplines. However, the complexity of ES demands proficiency in both technical and soft skills, such as data management, methodological rigor, collaboration, and conflict resolution. Despite the significance of ES, academic libraries often struggle to provide comprehensive training that addresses this dual skill set.¹⁻⁴ Recognizing this gap, our university medical library introduced an experiential learning model designed to equip librarians with the competencies required to excel in this evolving field. This paper reflects on the implementation, outcomes, and lessons learned from this innovative approach.

Experience

The foundation of our experiential learning model is rooted in a graduate-level education program designed to prepare future health sciences librarians. This initiative sought to address the disconnect between academic instruction in library schools and the practical skills required for professional success, with the hope of attracting new talent to health sciences librarianship.⁵ This program established essential training protocols and clarified which competencies should be prioritized when equipping newly graduated and appointed faculty librarians with ES skills.

The program was initially piloted in 2020 with a single graduate student embarking on their first ES project, allowing for close observation and adaptation of the learning model.

Building on this foundational experience, the library welcomed two early career librarians in 2024. Their current participation enabled further refinement and enhancement of the program, as real-time feedback and collaborative adjustments led to a more robust and responsive approach. This iterative development ensured that the experiential learning model was not only grounded in practical needs, but also agile enough to evolve alongside the rapidly changing landscape of ES in academic libraries.

The Model

Through the experiential learning model, junior faculty are paired with seasoned librarians, creating dynamic mentorship opportunities. These partnerships fostered hands-on collaboration on real ES projects, allowing participants to not only refine their technical abilities but also develop critical soft skills including negotiation, self-advocacy, conflict resolution, methodological instruction, and fluency with evolving software and data practices. Mentees evolve from novice learners to confident professionals capable of managing complex ES collaborations, teaching methodological standards, and navigating authorship negotiations. These mentees slowly build competency and become more confident. As confidence increases, mentees move through the stages of the model at their own pace.

Step 1: Beginner

At the beginner stage, new librarians are partnered with an experienced librarian who serves as both mentor and co-author for their ES project. Through this collaboration, beginners acquire foundational skills in literature searching and the essential methodologies of ES. As they progress, they start to apply these newly acquired skills in practical settings, allowing them to gain hands-on experience and build confidence in real-world applications.

Examples of work at the Beginner Level:

- Librarians are encouraged to attend team meetings and participate actively in discussions, gradually building their confidence within the group. They develop draft search strategies, gaining firsthand experience with the iterative nature of ES work. Asking questions during team meetings becomes an essential part of their learning process, which helps them deepen their understanding of ES methodologies.
- This is the initial phase of soft skill development, where observing a mentor's interactions during meetings provides a valuable introduction to essential skills like communication, negotiation, and conflict resolution, helping new librarians recognize and understand these competencies in practice.
- Regular meetings with a mentor provide opportunities to discuss the project, protocol, search strategies, and documentation in depth. Beginners are also expected to read about various methodologies, such as scoping reviews, rapid reviews, and systematic reviews, broadening their foundational knowledge. Through this process, they become more familiar with common questions and challenges encountered in the field.
- Participation in external ES training sessions is encouraged to acquire additional theoretical and supplemental knowledge from external providers.

- Additionally, beginners often receive co-authorship alongside their mentor. While the mentor leads much of the work, beginners can contribute as they feel comfortable, gaining valuable experience by shadowing or supporting searches, documentation, and other key tasks.

Competencies:

1. Acquire a thorough understanding of ES methodologies and their optimal applications.
2. Enhance literature searching abilities by gaining proficiency with principal databases and controlled vocabularies.
3. Implement sound data management practices, including systematic documentation of search strategies and outcomes.
4. Appreciate the significance of transparency and reproducibility in ES research methodologies.
5. Begin to develop effective communication skills to engage productively with research teams and mentors.
6. Establish a foundational knowledge of ethical considerations in ES, with particular attention to authorship and conflicts of interest.

Step 2: Novice

As a librarian gains confidence, they are welcome to lead a review project with a seasoned mentor available to help either in the background or as a co-author. Novice learners gradually develop their technical skills and gain confidence as research collaborators while benefiting from the guidance of experienced mentors. This level can last as long as necessary to build confidence.

Examples of work at the Novice Level:

- Librarians lead team meetings, develop search strategies, educate the team on protocol development, and advocate for effective search methods.
- At the novice stage, librarians gain confidence not only in navigating complex topics—such as nuanced health outcomes and quality of life measures—but also in holding both themselves and their research teams accountable for advancing the protocol to completion. It is recommended that librarians encourage their teams to finalize the majority of their protocol, including key elements beyond the search draft, prior to initiating the librarian's contributions. This approach helps prevent investing effort in projects that may not come to fruition, as our experience demonstrates that teams who complete protocols are significantly more likely to see their ES projects through to completion.

- Mentors provide behind-the-scenes support by reviewing search drafts, offering feedback, and modeling effective communication and role clarification.
- Mentees gradually gain confidence in handling challenges, such as authorship negotiations and differing opinions, relying on their mentors for guidance as they build these soft skills.

Competencies:

1. Develop confidence in independent decision-making and establishing their professional voice.
2. Demonstrate increased proficiency in the technical skills of ES support, such as constructing comprehensive search strategies, guiding research teams in protocol development, and advocating for best practices in literature searching.
3. Effectively present proposed search strategies, clearly articulate the rationale for selected keywords and database choices and respond constructively to feedback from faculty investigators.
4. Establish a strong foundation to facilitate increased autonomy in leading future projects.
5. Demonstrate foundational understanding of ES methodologies, including the ability to support searches, document strategies, and contribute to key project tasks under mentor guidance.
6. Develop initial skills in effective communication and collaboration, engaging with mentors and research teams.

Step 3: Competent

Reaching the competent level marks a significant transition for librarians, where deeper experience and growing confidence allow for greater independence in ES work. At this stage, librarians not only refine their technical and collaborative skills but also begin to embrace new opportunities to supervise, coach, and serve as entry-level mentors and educators. This progression not only enhances their own professional development but also supports the next generation of ES practitioners through direct guidance and examples. Proficient mentors remain accessible to answer questions, offer insights, and serve as sounding boards for new ideas, ensuring competent level librarians are never isolated as they navigate increasingly complex aspects of ES.

Examples of work at the Competent Level:

- Librarians will lead ES projects independently, with minimal mentor oversight, while proactively seeking guidance for complex or unfamiliar challenges.

- Conduct comprehensive literature searches using advanced ES tools such as Covidence, DistillerSR, SR-Accelerator, TERA, and litsearchR, and begin to teach others how to use these resources effectively. This may include having colleagues shadow.
- Serve as a PRESS reviewer, evaluating the quality and rigor of search strategies for peer and team projects.
- Facilitate team meetings and collaborative problem-solving sessions, guiding teams through the selection and application of appropriate search methodologies.
- Navigate and resolve project challenges such as authorship discussions, conflicting opinions, and protocol adjustments with professionalism and confidence.
- Mentor beginner and novice level librarians, modeling effective communication, collaboration, and providing constructive feedback on search strategies and protocol development.
- Advocate for the librarian's role and expertise within multidisciplinary research teams.
- Available to assist with reviewing complex search strategies, offering brainstorming sessions, and providing guidance on search strategies for particularly challenging or abstract topics.

Competencies:

1. Demonstrated confidence in independent decision-making and possesses comprehensive knowledge of the ES process.
2. Exhibit proficiency in ES methodologies and related support tools, including Covidence, DistillerSR, SR-Accelerator, TERA, and litsearchR.
3. Able to clearly articulate the importance of rigor and reproducibility within research practices.
4. Effectively guide research teams in selecting and applying appropriate search methodologies.
5. Exercise full autonomy over projects while engaging mentors and peers for collaborative problem-solving and guidance as needed.
6. Possess the skills and expertise necessary to serve as a PRESS reviewer with confidence.

Step 4: Proficient

The Proficient level represents the culmination of the ES mentorship journey—a stage in which individuals step into the role of mentors themselves and embody the highest standards of professional practice. As the final level within this framework, proficient librarians are

recognized not only for their mastery of technical ES methodologies but also for their expertise in the nuanced soft skills. They are adept at managing conflict, resolving complex authorship negotiations, and navigating challenging team dynamics with diplomacy and confidence. Proficient librarians are unwavering advocates for their role, skillfully articulating the value and importance of librarian expertise in ES projects to diverse stakeholders. They consistently uphold and promote the highest standards of rigor and reproducibility, ensuring that best practices are maintained even in the most complex or high-pressure situations. Their influence extends beyond direct project involvement—they inspire peers, nurture emerging professionals, and foster a culture of excellence, collaboration, and continuous learning within the library and broader research community.

Completeness:

1. Exhibits mastery of advanced ES methodologies, with the expertise to troubleshoot, innovate, and refine complex search strategies across diverse and challenging topics.
2. Demonstrates exemplary leadership in team settings, adeptly facilitating collaboration, resolving conflicts, and managing multifaceted authorship and stakeholder negotiations with professionalism and tact.
3. Champions the principles of rigor, reproducibility, and transparency, ensuring the highest standards are upheld in all ES projects and serving as a model for peers and mentees alike.
4. Articulates and advocates for the unique contributions and essential value of librarian expertise in ES to a wide spectrum of audiences, from multidisciplinary research teams to institutional leadership.
5. Mentors, trains, and inspires colleagues at all career stages, cultivating a culture of continuous learning, mutual support, and professional excellence within the library and research community.
6. Engages in ongoing professional development, actively contributing to the advancement of ES practice through scholarship, outreach, and participation in local, national, or international initiatives.

Final Thoughts on the Model

The implementation of scaffolded responsibility and mentorship fosters a supportive environment for librarians new to ES services, facilitating their empowerment and professional development as future ES librarians. As librarians progress through the model, they are increasingly afforded opportunities to train their peers in ES best practices and skills, which deepens their own experience in mentorship, teaching, and professional communication. It is important to recognize that the model is inherently cyclical, allowing individuals to move fluidly between the first three levels—particularly Beginner and Novice—depending on the evolving demands of their roles and their ongoing development.

The immersive nature not only accelerated skill development but also cultivated a culture of equity and professional growth within our library.

Reflections

The voices of mentors, mentees, and graduate students provide a rich tapestry of insights into the experiential learning model's impact. The reflections below highlight the challenges faced, the skills honed, and the transformative nature of engaging in real-world ES projects. By sharing their experiences, participants elucidate on the growth fostered by dynamic mentorship and collaborative engagement, as well as the broader implications of this approach for professional development and library practices. Presented below are reflections from individuals involved at various stages of the model's development: from those who contributed to its initial design, to current participants in the model, students beginning their engagement with the ES process, and, finally, our newly appointed Library Director.

Mentor Reflection

As a senior faculty member, I often mentor junior faculty on ES processes by inviting them to shadow me in project meetings or during relevant instruction. I also work to make myself available to discuss ES in a collaborative and supportive manner. Through these mentorship experiences, I have been able to guide junior faculty through conversations with users who are resistant to following established ES methodologies. These can be difficult situations to navigate, but they are an essential part of librarian involvement in ES projects. Ultimately, the librarians are experts in the searching process and reiterating that to junior faculty and users is necessary for projects to run smoothly. Justification and documentation are critical components of what I advise in the ES process. Confidence building is also something that I strive to instill in the junior faculty I work with. This comes through years of doing ES projects but can be built along the way in small gains. A user who follows our recommendations for search strategies and protocol development builds confidence incrementally. As the junior faculty gain these experiences, they will ultimately build the assurance they need for instructing the users on their ES projects.

I find the mentoring process particularly rewarding because I see the value librarians play in ES projects. When we can mentor new faculty into learning soft skills while providing funding for the training on technical skills, the junior faculty flourish. They become more confident in advocating for methodological best practices, more adept at guiding users through ES processes, and more resilient when faced with challenges or setbacks. The transformation I observe in mentees—from tentative beginners to self-assured professionals—underscores the power of this approach. Witnessing their progression is a constant affirmation of the importance of our work.

Early Career Librarians Reflections

We joined the University of Kentucky as Health Sciences Librarians in July 2024. Prior to these roles, we had both worked at the Medical Center Library during graduate school—one through a practicum, the other through a graduate assistantship—where we gained some initial exposure to ES projects. While we had engaged with webinars and workshops that introduced the fundamentals of ES early in our careers, neither of us had participated in a full

project from start to finish.

In the first few months of our current positions, we each joined an ES project under the guidance of an experienced librarian. We both found that this hands-on experience was where our true learning began. While prior training had provided a solid technical foundation, it was the day-to-day involvement in research meetings that illuminated how these projects function in practice. We learned essential skills such as managing team expectations, communicating effectively with researchers, and maintaining methodological integrity when under pressure to make compromises. These lessons were instrumental in deepening our understanding of the ES process.

With this foundational experience, we were able to co-lead a scoping review, supported as needed by our supervisors. This collaborative model has significantly enriched our learning. We continue to benefit not only from expert mentorship, but also from the opportunity to learn from each other's perspectives and approaches. Working alongside fellow early-career librarians in a supportive environment has allowed us to apply our growing skill set meaningfully, build confidence, and develop professionally through sustained, hands-on engagement.

Student Reflection

Prior to becoming the Medical Center Library graduate intern, I was not familiar with ES. Upon first exposure to ES, it was a very difficult concept to understand. It was a gradual process that started with learning about literature searches from my primary supervisor and many of the other librarians. At first, I would observe my supervisor conducting a literature search as they explained the reasoning behind their actions. I was soon provided with research prompts submitted by faculty and clinicians that the librarians had previously conducted searches on. I also relied on reading material and video tutorials supplied by the library. It was through these one-on-one meetings and shadowing sessions that proved to be most effective in developing my understanding of the intricacies of conducting literature searches.

After I began to feel confident in my literature searching skills, I was introduced to the concept of systematic reviews. When I was first introduced to literature searches, I was able to quickly understand their general concept. Systematic reviews proved to be a far more daunting and challenging concept to understand. At first, I was unable to wrap my head around the idea of conducting such a broad search that attempted to identify every study relating to a specific topic. Having to adjust my scope from the narrower research mentality of literature searches to the far broader and more all-encompassing mentality of systematic reviews was very difficult. Today, thanks to the experiential learning practices provided by the librarian, I believe that I am in a very good position as I begin to approach graduation and enter a career as a full-time health librarian.

Former Student, Current Mentor Reflection

I am currently a full-time Health Sciences Librarian and ES mentor, but at one point I was also one of the first students/early-career librarians to learn about ES within this model. Being both a former student and current mentor, I believe I have a unique perspective on how the model works and operates. First, I believe this model works because of the ease in which I

moved from student to mentor. After gaining both knowledge and confidence I felt the transition from mentee to mentor was smooth. My knowledge of ES did not develop overnight. It took years of diligent work and practice and much of this work was done under the supervision of mentoring librarians. These librarians were able to pour their knowledge into me over many years, and now I do the same to our new students and early-career librarians.

Much of the success of this model relies on the librarian's willingness to be consistent mentors and educators. To be a mentor in this model means to be available for questions on librarianship roles, how to navigate new situations, and systematic search-building queries. Additionally, mentor librarians in this model allow newer librarians to share credit and co-authorship on ES papers. For a model like this to build successful ES librarians, there needs to be a level of selflessness and generosity in the mentors. Finally, I believe that moving past the novice role comes when one feels comfortable and willing to become a mentor themselves. However, once I moved past that role, I was lucky enough to still be mentored by the librarians who mentored me in the beginning. I now share that luck with others as I am still learning and growing.

New Administrator Reflection

As Director of the Medical Center Library, I have had the privilege of observing the transformative power of the experiential learning model on both our junior and senior faculty over the past year. With over two decades of experience in library and information sciences, I have seen many professional development strategies come and go—but few have had the lasting impact that I believe this model possesses. Through this experiential training model, I believe we are developing a structured framework that will not only support the Medical Center Library now, but in the years to come.

My own journey began with a strong theoretical foundation during my MSLS studies. Yet, the most meaningful learning came from informal mentorships with seasoned medical librarians who generously shared their expertise. At the time, this approach did not have a specific name. Today, it is referred to as experiential learning. They taught me not only how to search effectively, but also how to navigate the interpersonal dynamics of our profession—skills we now recognize as essential soft skills. Although this is important for every librarian, it is not typically taught in the classroom; rather, it is acquired through experience. This can be challenging for junior faculty members, particularly if they are competing with senior faculty members for ES projects.

What sets this model apart is its intention. Rather than relying on trial-by-fire or passive training, we've created structured, supportive environments where junior faculty can learn through guided experiences. Senior librarians mentor their colleagues through real-time ES projects, modeling negotiation, collaboration, and reflective practice. This approach has fostered a culture of mutual growth: junior faculty gain confidence and competence, while senior faculty refine their leadership and teaching skills.

From an administrative perspective, this model has also proven invaluable for succession planning and equity. It ensures that institutional knowledge is passed on, that all voices are supported, and that our library remains adaptive and resilient. The experiential learning model

doesn't just train individuals—it strengthens our entire professional community. Through this model, we give junior librarians the tools they need to succeed faster, enhancing their experience, and supporting their growth as they transition to senior faculty. With this approach, we are actively creating an environment that encourages continuous improvement and collective success, ensuring the long-term vitality and stability of our library.

Discussion

The implementation of our experiential learning model in ES education highlighted several pivotal insights that are critical for both individual and organizational growth within academic libraries. This model, rooted in scaffolded responsibility and mentorship, has demonstrated significant impact on the development of technical, interpersonal, and leadership skills among librarians at varying career stages.

Bridging the Skills Gap

Traditional ES education often emphasizes technical competencies such as search strategy development and protocol adherence. However, our experiential model revealed the necessity of integrating soft skills—such as communication, negotiation, conflict resolution, and project management—into training. Through hands-on involvement in real-world projects and direct mentorship, librarians learned not only the mechanics of ES but also how to navigate complex team dynamics and advocate for methodological best practices. This holistic approach produced well-rounded professionals who are better equipped to manage the multifaceted demands of ES work.

Reflective Practice as a Tool for Growth

Our model fosters reflective practice, encouraging mentees and mentors alike to thoughtfully assess their experiences. This practice facilitated continual professional growth, allowing individuals to identify strengths, address challenges, and transition confidently into roles as educators and leaders. By embedding reflection into the learning process, the model supports sustained development and adaptability in ES services. In a rapidly evolving field where new processes and tools for ES emerge almost daily, it is easy for professionals to lose ground, risking outdated skills and diminishing relevance without proactive reflection, engagement, and adaptation.

Mentorship Through Collaborative Engagement Structured mentorship emerged as a cornerstone of the model, providing tailored support and fostering a culture of equity and inclusion. Junior librarians and students benefited from the guidance of experienced mentors, who offered both technical instruction and encouragement. This dynamic led to incremental confidence building and prepared participants to take on greater responsibilities, including peer training and project leadership. The reciprocal nature of mentorship also allowed senior faculty to refine their own teaching and leadership abilities, reinforcing a cycle of mutual growth.

Utilizing Knowledge Transfer for Effective Succession Planning

A key insight from the model was its effectiveness as a framework for succession planning. By ensuring that institutional knowledge and expertise are systematically passed from experienced librarians to newer colleagues, the model has promoted organizational resilience. This intentional approach to professional development mitigated the risk of knowledge silos and ensured that the library could adapt to changing demands, attrition, and other unknown factors.

Equity and Workload Distribution

The experiential model promoted equity by actively involving junior faculty in substantive ES projects and decision-making processes. By distributing responsibilities and opportunities across the team, the model prevented the concentration of ES expertise and workload in a single individual. This not only empowered emerging professionals but also fostered a more inclusive and collaborative work environment.

In addition, the model facilitated the development of structured workflows, robust policies, and effective waitlist management strategies. These measures enabled the team to better manage and diversify ES expectations among patrons, while balancing librarian workloads in a collaborative, team-based environment. By implementing these systems, the library was able to offer more equitable ES services across six healthcare colleges and within a multi-institutional healthcare system.

Departing from the traditional one-to-one liaison approach, the model empowered a greater number of librarians to be trained and actively participate, allowing for more balanced workload distribution. This meant, for instance, that Medicine would not experience longer wait times for ES services compared to Health Sciences. The establishment of a centralized team structure further promoted service equity, ensuring consistent and fair support for all disciplines.

Transformative Impact on Library Culture

Perhaps most significantly, the model catalyzed a cultural shift within the library. As more librarians and students engaged in experiential learning and mentorship, a community of continuous improvement and shared ownership developed. This environment encouraged innovation, flexibility, and the pursuit of excellence in ES education and service delivery.

In summary, our experiential learning model revealed that comprehensive, intentional, and reflective approaches are essential for preparing librarians to meet the evolving challenges of ES work. The provided reflections specifically illustrate commonalities among librarians regarding their experiences with ES instruction and our model. Positive, first-hand accounts of this model serve as evidence of its effectiveness. By bridging skill gaps, fostering mentorship, and promoting equity, this model has set a new standard for ES education in academic libraries, ensuring both individual success and institutional sustainability.

Challenges

Despite the notable successes achieved through our experiential learning model in ES education, the journey has not been without its share of challenges. As our library transitioned

from traditional training methods toward a hands-on, mentorship-driven approach, several obstacles surfaced that required careful navigation and adaptation. These hurdles—ranging from role assignment complexities to confidence building for new librarians—offer important lessons for refining and sustaining the model’s effectiveness in a dynamic academic environment.

Some of the main challenges were in balancing workloads, adapting to evolving expectations, and maintaining ongoing engagement among both junior and senior librarians. Prior to adopting the experiential learning model, workload and workflow management within ES services largely depended on informal practices. For instance, before implementation, librarians typically selected ES projects based on their subject liaison responsibilities, which occasionally led to disparate caseloads—one librarian might oversee several simultaneous reviews in medicine, while another in allied health fields had significantly fewer assignments. In addition, having no formal way to designate a beginner librarian’s mentor may result in overlapping projects and duplicative or even conflicting advice, complicating the training process and project coordination.

To successfully implement the experiential learning model, it is essential to standardize best practices and workflows to promote consistency and quality across ES services. The introduction of this model emphasized the need for standardized workflows and the adoption of project management tools to track active projects. Recognizing that effective project management is essential for sustaining high-quality ES services, our library chose to integrate Asana into our service model, enabling us to track projects efficiently and better report data for continuous improvement.

Another key challenge faced in this model is supporting new librarians as they build confidence and navigate imposter syndrome. While experienced librarians serve as mentors, their role extends beyond simply teaching ES methodology—they must also empower newer colleagues to lead consultations, establish healthy boundaries with patrons, and continually strengthen their search skills to provide effective support throughout the review process. Imposter syndrome often manifests as self-doubt, reluctance to engage with researchers, and persistent worries about one’s expertise or preparedness.

Addressing these feelings requires a multifaceted approach. Mentors can offer reassurance and positive feedback, but genuine growth often comes with sustained practice and exposure to real-world scenarios. Over time, as new librarians accumulate hands-on experience, their confidence typically grows, enabling them to step into leadership roles and contribute meaningfully to the ES team. Recognizing that the journey to overcoming imposter syndrome is highly individualized, it’s important for both mentors and mentees to prioritize ongoing communication, self-reflection, and patience as part of the professional development process.

Takeaways

Reflecting on this experience has yielded several actionable lessons. The first being that experiential, mentored learning is a powerful tool for bridging technical and soft skill gaps in ES education. There are many valuable lessons that can be learned from attending webinars and reading articles but having firsthand experience interacting with researchers will develop

those soft skills in a much more meaningful fashion. This approach facilitates constructive teaching opportunities and enables librarians or students to address authentic challenges within a supportive environment.

Additionally, structured mentorship fosters professional development, equity, and long-term sustainability within library communities. Mentorship plays a vital role as a learning tool within the field of librarianship, particularly given the complexity of ES methods. Access to experienced mentors enables students and librarians to engage in substantive discussions regarding best practices in conducting reviews. Furthermore, mentorship can facilitate the learning process, making ES more approachable and engaging. Learners can be assured that any initial errors may be addressed and reviewed with a more experienced individual, enabling them to approach the learning process with increased confidence. Through this experiential and mentored approach, librarians and students alike develop into confident researchers who consistently uphold the highest standards of rigor and reproducibility in their ES work.

Reflective learning practices encourage individuals to thoughtfully examine their experiences, fostering deeper understanding and continuous professional growth. By integrating reflective practice into ES training programs, libraries can build confidence, enhance growth, and prepare librarians for mentorship roles. This confidence can also bleed into other aspects of a librarian's career and offers opportunities to continue learning and growing in their ES confidence. Students who understand the process of systematic searching feel more confident in their ability to conduct basic literature searches and feel more prepared to enter the job market. Librarians with experience managing review services, or review projects in general, learn project management skills and gain administrative experience.

The final takeaway is that academic libraries should prioritize the development of comprehensive, intentional learning models to support the evolving demand for ES services. The model described in this paper is of larger scale, but it began as a smaller agreement between two librarians and a graduate assistant. The scope of this model grew as new librarians and students began working at the library. But the success of the model hinged upon everyone agreeing to engage in all aspects. As the model grew it changed the culture of learning and mentorship in the library. Now, as ES are evolving, so are the model and librarians.

The experiential learning model implemented by our university medical library serves as a robust strategy for cultivating ES competencies at every stage of a librarian's career. By fostering professional growth, promoting equity, and ensuring the transfer of knowledge, this model sets a precedent for ES education in academic libraries.

CRediT Statement

Task	Author Initials
Conceptualization	LER, CMR
Methodology	LER, SH
Writing - Original Draft	LER, CMR, TGG, SH, RJM, AH, JMV, JMJ
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Supervision	LER
Project Administration	CMR

Artificial Intelligence Declaration

While reviewing and editing the manuscript, LR, SH, TGG used the University of Kentucky's Institutional License of Microsoft CoPilot to assist with revising and reworking individual sentences.

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